

# Afghanistan-based Airmen revive adopt-a-village program

by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Lindsey

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Afghan children and adults swarmed Airmen bearing gifts recently, marking the revival of Bagram Air Base's adopt-a-village program.

To create more room for the almost daily arrival of clothing, toy and school supply donations from people worldwide, the program restarted with three distribution missions in two days.

With eight pickup trucks loaded with goods, Airmen convoyed to the mountain villages of Kharoti and Dorani, and to the town of Jangadam on the first day, and to the nearby town of Hasankheyl on the second day. Donations included 50 bags of clothing, a pallet of drinking water, 40 personal hygiene kits, 25 blankets, and enough notebooks, pencils, pens, crayons, glue and teddy bears for more than 100 children.

## Culture shock

"It was a culture shock for me to see the way people here live," said Senior Airman April Siler, a supply technician deployed from Pope Air Force Base, N.C. "It felt good to be able to share the things we could."

For more than a year and a half, deployed troops have distributed food and clothing, and medical technicians have provided locals with field treatment through the program. Deliveries were put on hold through the summer and early autumn, as force-protection issues increased before Afghanistan's presidential election in October.

Although the visits may be done with goodwill in mind, traveling "outside the wire" doesn't happen on a whim; the visits are well-planned operations. Office of Special Investigations agents work closely with village elders and local Afghan militia forces commanders to ensure U.S. troops' safety. Besides developing a detailed mission plan that includes security forces posting guards, the agents request that the villagers also provide security during the visit.

"It was a little uncomfortable to see men walking around with AK-47s, but it



**Airman 1st Class Angelique Smith passes out coloring pencils and notebooks** to young villagers during a recent adopt-a-village visit. The 455th Expeditionary Support Squadron personnel support technician helped distribute toys and school supplies to more than 100 local children. Airman Smith is deployed to nearby Bagram Air Base from Pope Air Force Base, N.C.

was an incredible experience," said Staff Sgt. Christy Sullivan, noncommissioned officer in charge of services deployed from Travis Air Force Base, Calif. "I got exactly what I volunteered for, to see children's smiling faces and to help little kids here feel good for a while."

Some deployed Airmen gave up personal Christmas gifts, opting for the gift of giving instead. Adults in Lt. Col. Daniel Hawkins' family residing throughout the United States invested the money that would have been spent on goodies for each other to purchase school supplies and toys for local children.

## It's a win-win

The benefits of the program are mutual. It offers a venue for Americans to interact with local Afghans and goes hand-in-hand with the overall mission here — to help rebuild the nation and to establish peace and stability throughout the region, said Master Sgt. Robert Nolen, a patrol master deployed from Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

While Airmen handed out toys and supplies to children, Senior Airman Jason Weiss worked at helping ailing villagers. In three hours, the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group medical technician evaluated and provided field treatment for more than 60 men and children with the assistance of an interpreter. The most common ailments were flank and abdominal pain, and gastritis.

"My goal is the same as the overall military goal here: leave it better than we found it," Airman Weiss said. "I offer pain medication and antibiotics, but it's a temporary fix because their drinking water will simply reinfect them."

The Airmen said they hope the recent successful Afghan presidential elections will help the nation to continue to move forward in quality-of-life improvements including the rebuilding of clean wells, safe roads, hospitals and schools. Until then, Airmen will continue their outreach to provide whatever relief they can to the local people.

— Staff Sgt. Jennifer Lindsey  
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